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Testimony in Support of SB 415, AAC the Operations of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, the Establishment of a Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy Program, Water Conservation and the Operations of the Clean Energy Finance and Investment Authority

Before the Energy and Technology Committee March 15, 2012

Water Efficiency

I'm speaking in support of the sustainable water resources (Secs. 58-62) and PACE portions (Sec. 14) of this lengthy measure. You don't always see the environmental community and water companies linked arm in arm on water legislation, but you will today and at the Environment Committee tomorrow, where a related bill is under consideration.

We've learned through the 5-year stakeholder process and 3-month negotiation process leading to final passage of the streamflow law and regulations, that in order to share the water resource among all users we need a rate structure that promotes efficient water use. While CT and this committee supports efficient energy use in the energy rate structure, efforts by water utilities to conserve and manage water have been disallowed by the predecessor of PURA. Even in a drought, water utilities must keep selling water at the same rate to support their fixed costs in personnel and infrastructure. In an intelligent, sustainable system, the utility would manage the resource to continue to provide water to all users without exhausting reservoirs and draining waterways. The state's multi-stakeholder Water Planning Council has approved the efficiency concepts laid out in these sections; as a legislator involved in the long process of streamflow law and regulations, I urge your support as well.

PACE for Commercial Properties and Homeowners with Paid Mortgages

I'm also in strong support of the language to promote PACE (Property Assessed Clean Energy) Program for commercial property, and ask the committee to expand PACE to residential properties as soon as possible. Residents—in particular those who live in oil-heated homes—as well as commercial businesses cannot afford the rising cost of Northeast fuel prices. My own town of Wallingford has twice this winter allocated additional emergency funds to replace the empty fuel assistance account.

Vermont developed language to address the mortgage lien issue of PACE to satisfy federal mortgage agencies, although Office of Legislative Research's Kevin McCarthy says it covers only commercial properties. Perhaps the committee could start to assist homeowners by amending last year's authorization of PACE to direct it to a subset of owners: those who have already paid off their mortgage. PACE would then allow these homeowners to install the technology with no up front cost and start saving money immediately, while paying off the loan with their savings on reduced fuel bills. Please keep in mind the difficulties of homeowners who heat with expensive oil and assist them to get out from under this unaffordable burden.